

REDUCING

Food Waste

WHY it matters
WHO it helps
and HOW to
do it

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for Residents & Businesses

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Why It Matters

Throwing food away creates a myriad of problems; diverting it has a wealth of benefits

BY ALLEN PIERLEONI

The science is straightforward yet devastating: The third leading contributor to the greenhouse gas methane, which traps heat in our atmosphere, is decomposing organic waste in landfills. Food waste is the No. 1 type of material disposed of any type, and it accounts for 15% of all material disposed. Greenhouse gases contribute to a myriad of problems, including changes to our climate and disruptions in the food supply chain.

And there is another reason to avoid wasting food: Our region has an ever-increasing hunger issue. One in seven San Diegans were food-insecure before the pandemic; now the number is one in three.

California is addressing the issue with statewide mandates requiring a 75% reduction in organic waste disposal and a 20% increase in edible food recovery by 2025. The regulations, going into effect Jan. 1, 2022, will require cities and counties to be responsible for implementing programs—such as food scraps collection service.

“SB 1383, the driving force behind these mandates, is a significant law in California around recycling organics and will lead to a massive shift in behavior,” says Steve Weihe, Recycling Specialist with the County of San Diego, and leading public outreach and education efforts.

“Most people are used to putting food scraps and other organic waste into the trash bin, but now it will go into the green materials bin to become compost, renewable fuel or fertilizer,” Weihe says. “Getting that message across will be a priority for us, and will require a coordinated effort from the County, as well as other cities

and the waste haulers themselves.”

Among the programs’ many positives is job creation and a boost for San Diego’s economy. “Recycling is more labor-intensive than landfilling or incineration,” Weihe says. “Additional staff will be needed at the recycling and composting facilities in order to manage and process the additional volume of materials.”

Economic development also includes investments in new collection facilities.

Data shows composting and diverting organic waste creates more jobs than landfilling, and workers will be needed to manage materials at new and existing sites.

A key goal is to remove all organics from landfills, which will reduce methane. Currently, 40% of waste in landfills is organic. “If we recycle properly and divert food scraps and other organics,” he says, “there’s very little left to be disposed of in landfills. If that’s the case, the landfills should last a long time.”

Following the program guidelines “is something we definitely need everybody’s help on,” Weihe says. “Diverting organics to create compost and healthy soil is a positive step in helping mitigate the effects of climate change.”

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Steve Weihe
Recycling Specialist, Solid Waste
Planning and Recycling
County of San Diego
Department of
Public Works



Composting 101

How we Californians handle our household organic waste will change when new state mandates go into effect. Did you know organic waste can be composted at home? Composting is nature’s way to recycle. Composting is a simple practice that can improve your landscape and our larger community. In fact, San Diegans can take a cue from the county’s 350 registered organic farmers. They know the advantages compost brings, both to their own crops and to home gardens.

For starters, compost—decayed organic matter—enriches soil with nutrients and microorganisms, suppresses plant disease and promotes growth, bolsters soil structure, reduces erosion and suppresses pests.

“Compost also allows the soil to hold more water, reducing the irrigation demand,” says Steve Weihe, Recycling Specialist and Master Composter with the County of San Diego. “With the ongoing drought, compost has the potential to help provide greater resilience to our soils and plants.”

To learn more about composting, visit
www.sandiegocounty.gov/dpw/recycling/composting

A Win-Win Solution

BY ANNE STOKES

Anaerobic digestion turns organic waste into green energy

What happens to organic waste once it's collected? One particularly innovative option is anaerobic digestion.

"Numerous landfill studies have shown that the majority of items currently disposed of in landfills is organic, which includes green waste, food waste and food-soiled paper products," says Bob Hill, Director of Recycling of EDCO Disposal Corp. "By removing these items from the waste stream, we extend the life of our landfills and, more importantly, we improve air quality by capturing methane gas."

When organic materials break down in a landfill, the process releases methane, a greenhouse gas that is 85 times more potent than carbon dioxide. In landfills, where up

to 40% of materials are organic, those gases escape into the atmosphere. When processed through anaerobic digestion facilities however, methane is captured, refined and turned into biogas that can be used to fuel a variety of vehicles or converted into electricity to power homes and businesses. EDCO Disposal Corp's Near Zero vehicles run on renewable natural gas, providing the potential to make their fleet carbon neutral.

"We're removing the harmful elements that were being released into the atmosphere and at the same time we're utilizing that energy as needed. It's become a resource that wasn't there before," says Hill. "The more renewable natural gas we capture from programs like these, the less we have to excavate from virgin sources."

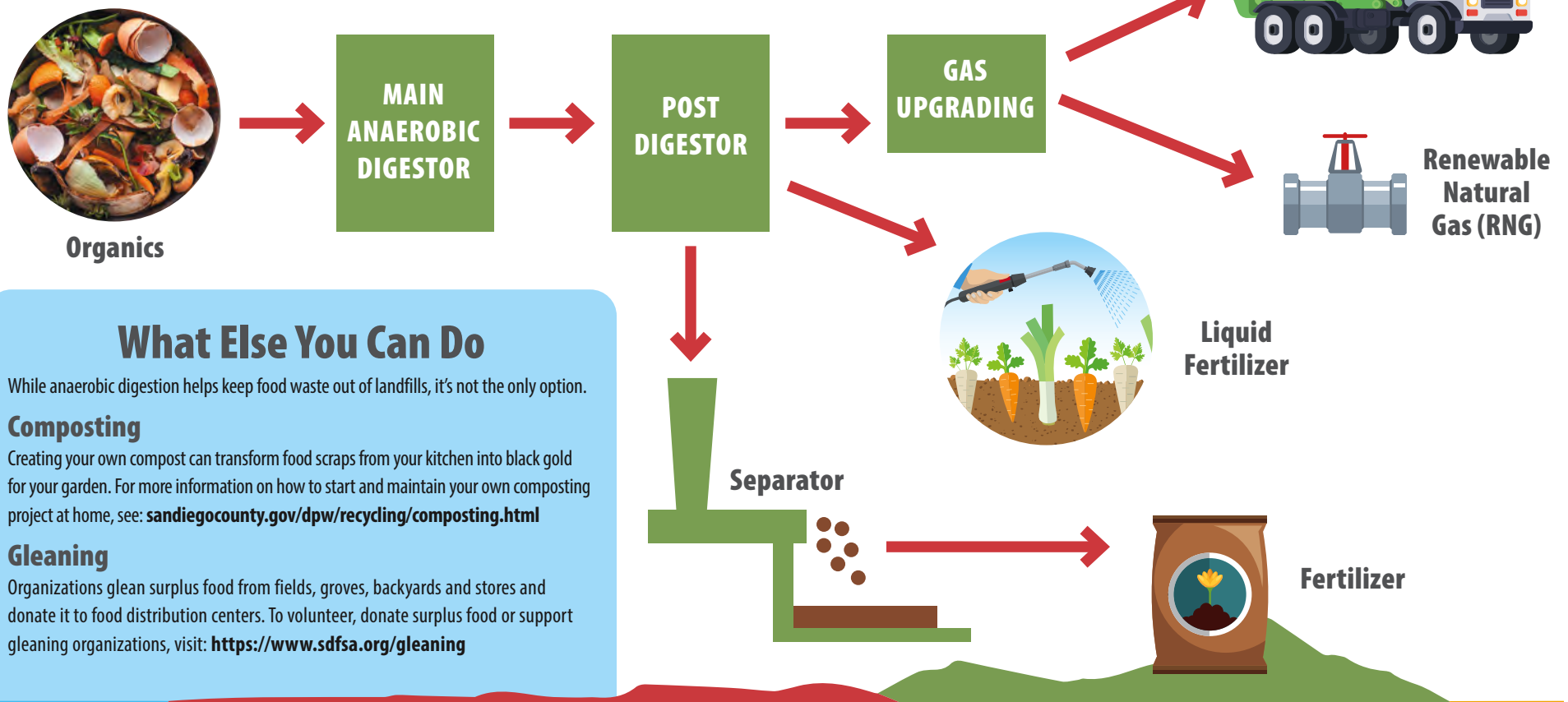
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Bob Hill, Director of Recycling, EDCO Disposal Corp

Anaerobic digestion creates a renewable energy source out of organic waste, which reduces reliance on fossil fuels and increases the life of landfills by diverting tons of materials away from finite available space. EDCO can process up to 93,000 tons a year, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 33,480 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.

"If you don't get organics out of the landfill, you're going to anticipate landfills closing a lot sooner. And once they close, the next landfill might not be available for 100 miles," Hill explains. "You're going to have to take it from your city and transport that. ... You'll also contribute to polluting the environment, depending on what type of trucks you're operating. All in all, that's going to increase costs dramatically."

100% Environmentally Sustainable & Renewable



Simple Steps

Changes are coming but they are surprisingly easy—for residents and businesses

BY ANNE STOKES

With its new recycling statutes, California is taking bold steps to create a healthier environment for future generations. While a cleaner California is something we can all get behind, the new rules and requirements might seem confusing—but they're actually very straightforward.

Here are the answers to the question on everyone's minds, *"What do I need to do?"*

What is Acceptable Organic Waste?

Keeping organic waste separate from other waste streams enables diversion of those materials away from landfills and ensures they get processed into renewable power resources and more. Organic waste includes:

- **Food scraps such as fruits, vegetables, seafood, meat, bones, dairy products, eggs, coffee grounds, leftovers and spoiled food (wet or damp materials are OK, but no liquids)**
- **Food-soiled paper such as napkins, paper towels, paper tea bags, paper plates, paper coffee filters and pizza boxes (wet or damp materials are OK)**
- **Yard waste such as lawn clippings, leaves, small branches, sawdust and untreated wood**



What is NOT Acceptable Organic Waste?

- Treated or painted wood
- Pet waste (including kitty litter)
- Animal carcasses
- Dirt or rocks
- Diapers
- Styrofoam
- Metals
- Glass
- Plastics (including plastic garbage bags)



Recycling Organic Waste is EASY!

Single-Family Households

For single-family households, all organic waste can soon be placed directly into your green waste bin. To simplify collection and storage, ask your waste hauler what resources they have available. To control moisture and odor, line the bottom of your food scrap container with newspaper, a paper towel, a paper bag or place it in the freezer.

Multi-Family Households

Work with your waste hauler and landscapers to ensure organic waste is diverted properly and your site is in compliance. Methods of organic waste collection may differ by waste hauler. Complexes will need to educate tenants how to participate in the new recycling program.

The County of San Diego offers FREE assistance and promotional materials.

Businesses

Work with your waste hauler and landscapers to ensure organic waste is diverted properly.

Methods of collection may differ by waste hauler. Provide education to new hires. Train and educate employees annually on proper material sorting.

The County of San Diego offers FREE assistance and promotional materials.



For more information, please contact a Recycling Specialist at Recycle@sdcounty.ca.gov or call 858-694-2456.

Food Rescue

Learn how a local market is already helping ease hunger in our region

BY ALLEN PIERLEONI

In 1984, Jim Someck opened the first of his four Jimbo's natural foods stores, specializing in fresh organic produce. His vision statement: "A piece of organic fruit in every child's lunch bag."

No surprise, then, that the innovative mini-chain has expanded its role into a vibrant part of San Diego County's hunger-relief network.

Through its Food Rescue program, last year Jimbo's donated more than 24 tons of food to nonprofit organizations that distributed it to the food insecure; so far this year, the figure has reached 28 tons.

"We're more diligent about capturing more of the (post-sell-by dated and excess) food at the stores before it goes out into the community as donations, or into our compost bins," says Jimbo's Sustainability Coordinator Stephanie Morris. "What can we do with perfectly good food we can't sell? The natural progression is to give it to those who can't afford to buy it."

Doing the right thing for our business and the community is why a lot of us work here."

Stephanie Morris
Jimbo's Sustainability Coordinator

"Minimizing food waste has always been part of Jimbo's ethos of supporting the community," says Jimbo's Marketing Director Kelly Hartford. "Over the years, various nonprofits came by and picked up any food we weren't able to sell. The idea has always been to extend the life cycle of the food."

Now, through its Food Rescue plan, Jimbo's works with a network of food-donation

partners that regularly pick up food donations and ultimately deliver them to those in need, Morris says.

Its partners include the Urban Street Angels, St. Michael's Church and Colina de Luz, which runs

an orphanage in Tijuana, Mexico. Further, Jimbo's teams with Feeding San Diego, one of the area's largest nonprofit hunger-relief organizations.

In addition, Hartford points out that Jimbo's assists "hundreds of local nonprofits throughout the year," helping with fundraising and educational programs.

County of San Diego. "Distributors get the food from a variety of sources," including supermarkets, restaurants, commercial kitchens, farms, packing sheds, farmers' markets and home orchards.

Getting the food from the source to the plate is a "chain of events," Ewalt says. It involves transportation, delivery to distribution hubs, storage and final distribution to the food insecure.

A community food distribution event, hosted by Jimbo's
PHOTO COURTESY OF JIMBO'S



Organic produce isn't the only item Jimbo's donates. "Contributions come from all the stores' departments," Morris says. "Everything from shelf-stable groceries to toiletries. We make sure perishables stay at the correct temperature, and we freeze meat and dairy items that are past their sell-by dates but are perfectly good. Feeding San Diego is especially

helpful in making sure we do it in a safe way."

Employee commitment is a key part of Jimbo's operation, Morris says. "Doing the right thing for our business and the community is why a lot of us work here. Also because of our ethos and what we're able to put into action."

How Donations Work

San Diego has a wide and intertwined network of hunger-relief organizations, large and small. They're devoted to rescuing surplus food before it becomes waste and putting it into the hands of the food insecure in the form of nutritious meals.

"The network is robust and very strong," says Stephanie Ewalt, a Recycling Specialist with the

County of San Diego. "Distributors get the food from a variety of sources," including supermarkets, restaurants, commercial kitchens, farms, packing sheds, farmers' markets and home orchards.

Getting the food from the source to the plate is a "chain of events," Ewalt says. It involves transportation, delivery to distribution hubs, storage and final distribution to the food insecure.

The Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank and Feeding San Diego are the largest hunger-relief organizations in the county, supplemented by hundreds of partner and independent agencies, food-recovery groups and armies of volunteers. Last year, the San Diego Food Bank distributed 28 million pounds of edible food, while Feeding San Diego provided more than 31.2 million meals.



Food Recovery Hierarchy

Source Reduction & Reuse
Reduce the volume of surplus food generated

Feed Hungry People

Donate extra foods to food banks, soup kitchens & shelters

Feed Animals

Divert food scraps to animal feed

Industrial Uses

Provide waste oils for rendering & fuel conversion & food scraps for digestion to recover energy

Composting

Create a nutrient-rich soil amendment

Landfill/ Incineration

Last resort to disposal

Expert Advice

Discover simple ways to reduce the amount of food that goes unused in your own household

BY ALLEN PIERLEONI

The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers some shocking numbers: Between 30% and 40% of all food produced in the U.S. annually is not eaten, but discarded. That's 133 billion pounds, with a value of \$161 billion.

The causes of food loss and waste are many, from spoilage to overproduction. Also, many retailers discard excess and "imperfect" produce, which can end up in landfills.

To help San Diego residents reduce food waste, Caitlin Lelles offers some practical advice. She's a Recycling Specialist in the Solid Waste Planning and Recycling section of the County of San Diego Department of Public Works.

Q: One tactic you mention is "source reduction." What is that?

A: It's the idea that the best way to combat food waste is to not create excess and waste in the first

place. You do that by buying only what you need, saving money at the same time.

Q: What are strategies you recommend?

A: Conduct a 'supply inventory' before you go to the store. If you know you have certain foods on hand, you won't buy more. A family of four wastes about \$2,000 a year in unused groceries. Also prepare a smart shopping list, go to the store with a meal plan, use a lot of the same ingredients for different dishes, don't overbuy. And freeze foods before they go bad. If food does spoil, consider composting it.

Q: Does all this

have a domino effect on the food chain?

A: Food waste also wastes all of the resources that go into making it—water, labor, transportation.

Q: In other words, be mindful?

A: Yes, though there is such a bounty of food at the store, we need to be thoughtful of how much

// A family of four wastes about \$2,000 a year in unused groceries."

Caitlin Lelles, Recycling Specialist, Solid Waste Planning and Recycling, County of San Diego Department of Public Works



we purchase to ensure that our food can actually be put to good use. With climate change, we're feeling the effects of this overproduction that we've gotten so used to, and we bring that home. Buying a couple of extra apples is not a big deal; those little actions multiplied by 330 million people add up to a lot.

Q: "Sell by" and "use by" dates can be confusing.

A: Many of those foods may well be perfectly safe to eat past those dates. If something looks, feels and smells OK to eat, it probably is.

Q: What's the key to raising food waste awareness?

A: Education is the tip of the spear, making people and businesses aware of the issues.

To Learn More:

tinyurl.com/PreventFoodWaste (Be sure to watch the video *The Life and Times of a Strawberry*)

tinyurl.com/EdibleFoodRecovery

ProduceGood partners (l-r) Jerilyn White, Alexandra White and Nita Kurmins Gilson
PHOTO BY TOMOKO MATSUBAYASHI

How to Do More

One of the most vital partners in curtailing food waste and upcycling fresh edible food to the food-insecure are food recovery organizations such as ProduceGood.

"We work with 2,500 volunteers, 500 growers and 50-plus partner agencies that help us distribute fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the county," says ProduceGood Co-Founder and Co-Executive

Director Nita Kurmins Gilson.

Its main function, she says, is "not only rescuing food that would otherwise go to waste, but reducing hunger by giving people access to fresh, nutritious fruits and vegetables. Those we serve are usually in food deserts without access."

To date, ProduceGood has recovered 425 tons of fresh produce, turning it into more than 2.5 million individual servings.

"We're not like a food pantry or a food bank, we don't store anything," Gilson says. "We're harvesting excess at the source and delivering it the same day."

They accomplish this by enlisting farmers, citrus growers and individuals with backyard fruit trees or orchards to donate their excess.

"Nutrition is so important," she says.

For more information: www.producegood.org



REDUCING

Food Waste

...is **IMPORTANT** for San Diego



DON'T throw food in the trash **INSTEAD:**

- Shop sensibly and buy only what you need
- Send party leftovers home with guests
- Donate your businesses' unused but still edible food
- Volunteer to help get food onto the tables of hungry San Diegans
- Put food waste, food-soiled paper and dirty cardboard in the green waste bin

DO tell others about the benefits of diverting food waste **INCLUDING:**

- Extends the life of our landfills
- Reduces greenhouse emissions and improves our environment
- Helps feed our neighbors who may be food insecure
- New jobs and a boost to our regional economy
- Creates compost, renewable natural gas and electricity



County of San Diego: Department of Public Works

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